

Daniel Byman, *Al Qaeda, The Islamic State, and the Global Jihadist Movement: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 284.

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Daniel Byman's latest book, *Al Qaeda, the Islamic State and the Global Jihadist Movement: What everyone needs to know*, comes at a crucial juncture in time when new terrorist outfits have been evolving out of the old ones. This piece of writing by Daniel Byman qualifies more as a handbook on al-Qaeda than an analytical attempt to ascertain how the terrorist organisations have developed over time. It may as well have been a detailed presentation of facts and figures if it were not for the author's personal but biased take on certain matters. It starts with a historical account of the pre 9/11 world and evolution of al-Qaeda long before that. In this section, the author explains how 9/11 was instrumental in bringing al-Qaeda from the periphery of global politics to its white hot centre. The author takes the readers back to the era of Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. According to him, this time around, al-Qaeda was slowly establishing its organisational structure which was upgraded with time. But the only thing more effective than the concrete structure of the organization was the idea behind its very existence. An idea that made a small band of people powerful enough to terrorize the world was the real ideology of this organization. However, this premise is based on a false assumption as these organisations are not merely composed of a few adulterated minds and wrongly interpreted religious notions. The truth, which the author completely ignores, is that there has been substantial evidence which points to the bigger powers that have funded such organisations.

The author clarifies that the US government or the CIA were not responsible for funding the *jihadists* against Russia. This statement clearly stands out as an attempt to whitewash the US role in the Afghan Soviet war. There is significant amount of detail regarding the evolution of al-Qaeda and its affiliates during the Soviet invasion. According to these details, the governing bodies were properly formed in order to train

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the insurgents under a proper infrastructure for better results. The Taliban, infuriated by US counterterrorism efforts provided al-Qaeda with safe havens and other types of logistical support. The author is of the view that the training camps set up in Afghanistan were the bedrock of the new era of terrorism that was to take the world by storm in the upcoming years. Or in words of Michael Sheehan (US State Department), “Afghanistan was the swamp these mosquitoes kept coming out of.” Thus, all strands of global jihadist ideologies sprang from al-Qaeda in Afghanistan.

According to Byman, the US military did not have the organization on its hit list. In those days, slowly, the organization was helping other jihadist groups all over the Middle East, Africa and South Asia in their individual missions. This was all made possible due to the elaborate training process that the recruits went through. The system included filling out forms describing details about their health, age, family and education. The most interesting factor, however, was the ‘measurement’ of each recruit’s religiosity. They were asked about their military experience alongside their prayer count for every day. Those who could recite verses from the Holy Quran by heart were favoured above others. The author made it a point to mention how religion was forced on them. While there is no denying that their own interpretation of religion is extremely important to such terrorist organisations, it is also quite evident that this is oversimplification of the sentiment or reason behind such ideologies. Diversified research has proven that terrorism in any society is not merely due to wrongful interpretations of religion but due to an assortment of factors such as poverty, unemployment or even foreign involvement.

On one hand, the author reiterates how religion is the only force driving these individuals to do the heinous crimes that they normally commit but then he talks about the ‘unreligious’ side of these recruits. Counterterrorism operations unearthed some evidence of inappropriate imagery and videos on the browser history of the al-Qaeda recruits. Thus the point that has been made here is that these recruits are not only psychotic killers but also perverted and frustrated adults. Internet has also been added to the recruitment efficiency of these organisations. As the reader progresses through the ‘tale of al-Qaeda’ as narrated by Daniel Byman, he learns about different factions and branches of Islam.

Salafism, Wahabism, Deoband, Ahle Hadith and several other interpretative branches of Islam have been briefly explained by the author. Byman tries to explain the fundamentals of the different schools of thought in Islam while it reflects a rather misleading image of Islam as a 'divided religion'. As he tries to connect the origin of the terrorist ideology to either of these groups, it seems like a forced way of finding connections in the wrong place. No faction of Islam, in any way of its true interpretation, can relate to the ideology of terrorism which allows its followers to kill countless innocent individuals. Even an implication towards such an idea is outrageous.

Towards the end, Daniel Byman turns to the 'Islamic State.' He explains how this contemporary evil emerged from the corrective prisons of Iraq. It is, perhaps, the most blatant of ironies to befall any major power in the world that the deadliest terrorist group is formed in a penitentiary that was created to contain terrorism. Today, it poses existential threats to all countries of the world. The most intriguing factor is their financial supremacy over all other terrorist groups. This financial benefit in the first place is the reason they are able to pull off feats that otherwise would have been entirely impossible. The author calls the IS, a current form of al-Qaeda. Comparing its organisational structure, it becomes clear that the IS has a state of the art system of recruitment, training and planning.

In the end, the author asks a few questions, is al-Qaeda over? Has it been replaced or has it put on a new garb of the deadly Islamic State? Can its new form be defeated by any singular or joint efforts? All these are questions that have been asked time and again but no solutions have been offered so far. Daniel Byman's effort adds a little more to the existing literature on al-Qaeda and its affiliates but it casts an impression over readers of a differing mindset that also adds to the existing 'Islamophobia.' The author clearly has all the information, what is needed is empathy and a little perspective.